JUNE, 1971

THE NUMISMATIC MESSENGER

VOL. 1 NO. 6

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SIEGE COINS OF MALTA

by

Constantine Congas, F.R.N.S.

The French Fortress of Malta was under siege by the British during the Napoleonic campaign. General Vaubois, commanding the fortress during the siege (June 1798-September 1800) was faced with an economic crisis in 1799. After seizing gold and silver from the pawnshops of Valetta (the capitol of Malta), Vaubois struck ingots which were used as money. In addition to gold and silver, copper is believed to have been used.

In conformity with French Military Law, Vaubois issued a "Mandat-de-Monaie" for the funds he had seized, payable by France at the end of hostilities. The fortress fell to the British in the latter part of 1800, and the "Mandats" were never redeemed.

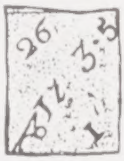
Of the gold ingots, bearing a Maltese lion rampant in an oval depression on one side and the inscription on the reverse, only 365 were struck. In addition to the mark of value and the assayer's initial, each was serially numbered, no two being alike.

The silver was first issued in corresponding design to the gold but later a silver siege 'Dollar' of 30 Tari was struck. It bore a Maltese cross as the central figure of the obverse, surrounded by T 30 above, R and F to the left and right respectively of the cross, and the date 1800 below. The French Cap of Liberty is the solitary device on the reverse.

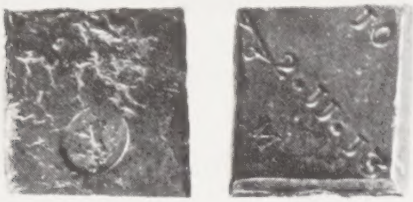
Of the copper, not a single specimen is known to have survived.

LIST OF KNOWN INGOTS

Gold Ingots #24
16 Scudi, 10 Carlini,
10 Grani (÷ being
an old form of 10)

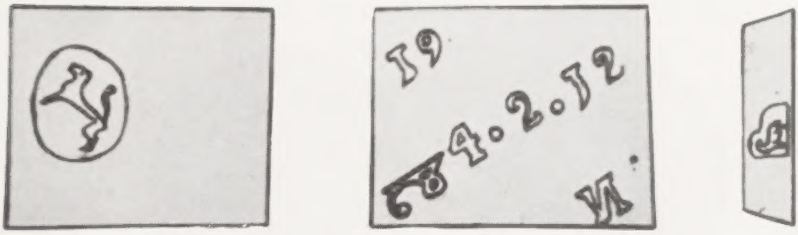


Gold Ingot #26
17 Scudi, 3 Carlini,
5 Grani



Silver Ingot #10
2 Scudi, 11 Carlini, 13 Grani

Silver Ingot #13
3 Scudi, 4 Carlini, 6 Grani



Silver Ingot #19
4 Scudi, 2 Carlini, 12 Grani
Believed to be in a collection in Malta.

Dollar of 30 Tari: 1800

Photos of Gold Ingot #24 and Silver Ingots #10 and 13 courtesy of VALLETTA MUSEUM, MALTA
Drawing of Gold Ingot #26 appeared in B. Max Mehl's Star Rare Coin Encyclopedia.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE COINS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

by B. J. Castenholz

GENERAL DISCUSSION (continued)

By an act of Congress, in 1853, the weight of the silver coins was to be slightly reduced. As this came in February, the coinage had already begun. The mint, therefore, added small arrow heads on each side of the date of the half dime, dime, quarter dollar and half dollar, to indicate the change had been made. The silver dollar, not considered a subsidiary coin, was not reduced in weight, and the arrow heads therefore did not appear on it. In addition to the arrows, a sunburst of rays was added behind the eagle on the reverse of the quarter and half dollars. This reverse device was removed before the commencement of the coinage of 1854, and the arrows disappeared at the end of 1855. A few coins were struck before the weight reduction took place. Half dimes and dimes occur without arrows from both Philadelphia and New Orleans. Only a small number of 1853 Philadelphia quarters exist without arrows and rays. The opposite is true of the half dollar: the only coins without arrows and rays being from New Orleans,

and they are among the rarest regular issues of the entire United States coinage.

The coinage act of March 1853 effected the three cent piece as the act of February had effected the other subsidiary silver coins. That is, the weight and fineness were changed. The original design of the three cents was of a six pointed star on the obverse, bearing a shield. The reverse bore III enclosed in a fancy C, all within a circle of stars. In order to indicate the change in metallic content, two extra outlines were added to the star on the obverse and an olive sprig was placed over the III and a bundle of arrows was placed below the III on the reverse. This occurred at the beginning of 1854. As the act was passed in March, 1853, and further, as the coinage of three cent pieces was 11,400,000 in 1853, it appears likely that the weight change may have occurred before the design change.

The gold dollar, with head of Liberty, was redesigned by Longacre in 1854 to bear the head of an indian maiden. Also in that year another design of an indian princess was adopted for the new three dollar gold coin. The design on the three dollar

gold was far superior to that on the one dollar and in 1856 the dollar was again changed to that of the larger gold piece.

The cent and the half cent, made of nearly pure copper, were discontinued in 1857, in favor of a smaller cent of copper-nickel alloy. After many patterns the final design for the new coin was Gobrecht's flying eagle for the obverse, and Longacre's reverse, of almost the exact style as used on the gold dollar (type II and III) and the gold three dollars.

As strikingly beautiful as any regularly issued coin in the entire United States series, the flying eagle cent was discontinued after less than two years. This was done in favor of the indian cent, first struck in 1859 with a reverse of simple design: ONE CENT in a wreath of laurel, the two boughs tied at the bottom. The following year the reverse underwent another change, substituting a wreath of oak, tied at the bottom, and with the tips separated by a small shield.

The silver three cents was again changed at the onset of 1859, reducing the star's outlines to two, but the reverse remained unchanged.

1860-1918

The reverse of the Indian Cent, first coined in 1859, was redesigned in 1860. The laurel wreath was replaced by an oak wreath, and the national shield was added between the wreath

tips. It is interesting to note that a design identical to this, except for differences in the shield, first appeared in 1858 as a pattern, before the Indian Cent was first regularly coined. This exact design is found on a pattern of 1859. Apparently a great deal of vacillation surrounded the selection of the cent design: new types occurred in 1857, 1859, and 1860.

In 1860, the half dime and dime were modified by placing the legend UNITED STATES OF AMERICA on the obverse, and changing the wreath to that of corn stalks. These changes did not affect the other silver coins.

The following year, 1861, a new design was initiated for the double eagle. It was, however, almost immediately suspended in favor of the previous design. Known for the engraver, Anthony Paquet, the change only affected the reverse of the coin, and that only slightly. Struck both at Philadelphia and San Francisco, it is interesting to note that after the officials at Philadelphia determined the change would not be successful, the order

was sent to San Francisco to cease using the die. It is in the time which the mail communique took between the two mints that the San Francisco pieces were struck.

The mid 1860's saw many changes and innovations. The composition of the cent was changed during the coinage year of 1864 to bronze. The same material was used in the coinage of the two

cent piece, initiated in 1864. The following year the first nickel coin was issued, a three cent piece. It was intended to take the place of the silver three cent coin. It was, however, little more successful than its predecessor. The last of the silver three cent coinage occurred in 1872, that of the nickel three cent coin ceased in 1889.

Nickel, initiated in the coinage of three cent coins in 1865, and used as an alloying element in the 1857-64 cents, was chosen for the new five cent coin of 1866. Using a similar design to that of the two cent piece, it first appeared with a 5 on the reverse, surrounded by a circle of alternating stars and rays. Part way

through the 1867 coining year the rays were deleted. Unlike the

two and three cent coins, the five cent coin in nickel was so popular that by 1873 the last of the half dimes were coined.

A minor change occurred to the reverse of several silver and gold denominations during 1866. The motto IN GOD WE TRUST carried on a ribbon was placed above the eagle, similar to the earlier E PLURIBUS UNUM motto which had been removed in the 1830's. The change affected the quarter, half, and one dollar in silver, and the half eagle, eagle, and double eagle in gold. A few pieces of 1866 exist without the motto: the Philadelphia quarter dollar and half dollar are unique, two specimens exist of the dollar. The San Francisco half dollar, half eagle, eagle, and double eagle without the motto are not rare.

The controversial coinage act of 1873 affected the coinage in many ways. It reorganized the mint, as a Bureau of the Federal government; it discontinued the two cent piece, silver three cent piece, the half dime and the dollar; and it created the trade dollar and made it legal tender in the United States. This last is

an enigma. The intent of a trade dollar was for external, not domestic use. Another very significant part of the coinage act was the increase in weight of the dime, quarter dollar, and half dollar. Each of these coins had been struck in 1873 before the act was passed. Therefore, arrow heads were again used to indi-

cate the weight change. The arrow heads were placed beside the date, on either side. They were removed at the end of 1874.

Before going any further, it might be worthwhile to look at the great variety of coins being struck at this time. For example, take the coinage of 1868. The cent and two cent piece were struck in bronze. The three cent pieces were being coined both in silver and copper-nickel, as were the half dime and five cent coin. Then there were the dime, quarter dollar, half dollar, and dollar of silver, as well as the dollar, quarter eagle, three dollar piece, half eagle, eagle, and double eagle: a total of sixteen different coins. Significantly, three cases exist where two coins of different metals or alloys both had the same face value. (For the collector of proof coins, the year 1873 must be the greatest chal-

lenge with twenty different coins minted that year — and that not counting the open and closed 3 varieties on nearly each coin.) In addition to the great number of different types of coins being struck in the mid and later part of the 19th century, many of the coins could be further subdivided by their origin.

In 1838 the first three branch mints began coining. New Orleans struck silver and gold, Charlotte and Dahlonega struck gold only. The location of the latter two were quite significant. North Carolina and Georgia produced a large portion of this country's gold supply before the California gold rush. Easy access to the mint was thus provided. The San Francisco mint opened in 1854, and immediately began coining all values of gold, from the dollar to the double eagle (except the three dollar piece which was initiated that year and first struck at San Francisco in the following year). A small amount of silver was coined at San Francisco beginning in the second year of its operation, but not until into the 1860's did the silver output become substantial, and all of these earlier pieces are very scarce.

Credit for illustrations used in this article is due Western Publishing Company, Inc., Racine, Wisconsin, copyright holders of *A Guide Book of United States Coins* by R. S. Yeoman, in which these illustrations appear.

Part I will continue in the July issue.

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